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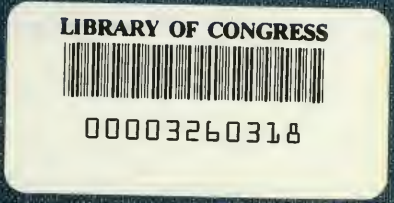

THE
UNFOLDING OF
OLD GLORY

BY

TELFAIR MARRIOTT MINTON

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SOCIETY OF COLONIAL WARS,
SONS OF THE REVOLUTION,
MILITARY SOCIETY OF WAR OF 1812,
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"I pledge Allegiance to my flag, and to the Republic for which it stands; one Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for All."

THE flag of a nation plays an important part in its history. Moreover, even the slightest change in a nation's flag is often an historical milestone. This is as true of the history of the United States as of any other country.

The United States, as a nation, is a daughter of Great Britain. The national flag of the United States was therefore naturally derived from the flag of the mother country.

Our flag is a growth rather than a creation—its process of evolution had its beginning in the early part of the seventeenth century and its last unfolding was in 1912.

Before we became an independent nation, we were thirteen British colonies (Massachusetts Bay, Rhodeisland and Providence Plantations, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia) which banded together in 1774 as the United Colonies of America.

On July 4, 1776, the United Colonies of America declared that they were free and independent States, the United States of America.

The mainland of the continent of North America was discovered in the year 1000 A. D. by Leif Erickson.

England's claim to the mainland of the North American continent was based upon the discoveries and explorations of John Cabot, who on June 24, 1497, landed at Newfoundland and took possession of the country in the name of England.

In 1578 and 1583 England made several unsuccessful attempts to colonize the lands to which she had secured title. In 1585 a colony was established on Roanoke Island, Virginia, but it was abandoned during the following year. A second colony was established on Roanoke Island in 1587, but to this day no one knows what ever became of the colony.

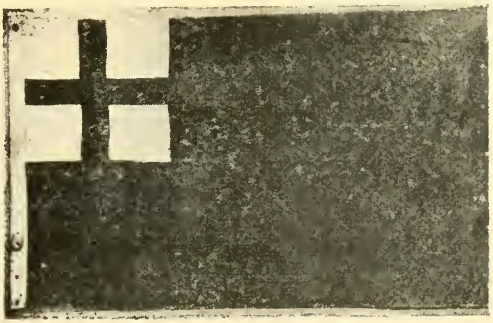
On the thirteenth day of May, 1607, the first permanent English Colony was established by Captain John Smith at Jamestown, Va. This was the corner-stone and the beginning of the United States of America.

The flag of England at the beginning of the fifteenth century was the Red Cross of St. George on a white field.

In 1603, by the death of Queen Elizabeth, James VI of Scotland became James I of England. His cherished scheme was to form a union of Scotland and England, but his nearest attainment thereto was the drafting of a Union flag, which contained the blended crosses of St. Andrew and St. George. This flag was called the "King's Colours" or "Jacques Union."

The "Susan Constant," the "Godspeed," and the "Discovery," which brought the colonists to Virginia in 1607, and the "Mayflower," which carried the Pilgrim fathers to Plymouth, Mass., in 1620, flew at their foretops the flag of England and at their main-tops they carried the King's Colours. So these two flags became our first flags.

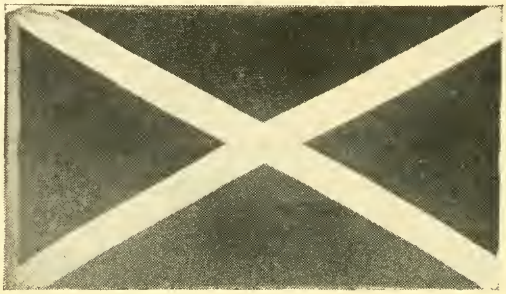
In 1630 the colonists who came to Boston, Mass., brought with them the first colonial flag—an emblem which was destined to play an important part in the future history of England and later of Great Britain, and still later to become the basis of an emblem for the new nation, the United States of America.



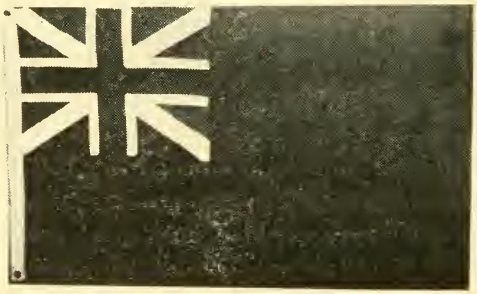
This flag, or more properly speaking this ensign, the Red Ensign of England, was our flag, (Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhodeisland and Providence Plantations, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia

and Carolina from practically the beginning of these colonies, and of New York, New Jersey and the counties of New-Castle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware after 1664), until the official union of England and Scotland in 1707, as Great Britain.

In 1707 the "King's Colours" or "Jacques Union" became the national flag of Great Britain. In drafting the design for this flag, King James I, who was a Scotchman, caused the Red Cross of St. George, the flag of England, to be placed upon that of St. Andrew, retaining the blue field of the Scottish banner as the field for the Union. The banner of Scotland was the White Cross or saltire of St. Andrew on a blue field.

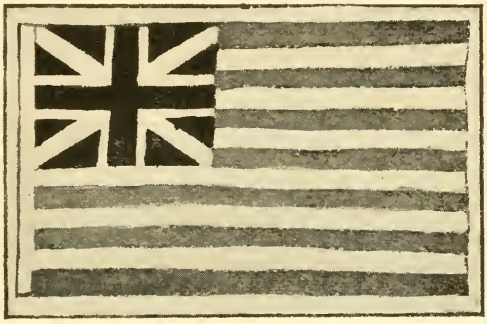


In 1707, Queen Anne and the British Parliament caused to be passed an act calling for the union of the blended crosses on a blue field on every flag and banner of Great Britain. By this act the red cross of St. George on a white field was removed from the Red Ensign and the union of the crosses on a blue field substituted.



This modification of the Red Ensign, the Red Union Ensign, became our flag, (Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhodeisland and Providence Plantations, New York, New Jersey, the counties of New-Castle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Carolina and Georgia), and remained as such until the colonies displayed the emblem of the new union, the United Colonies of America, in 1776.

On January 1, 1776, the United Colonies unfoiled on Prospect Hill, Charlestown, Mass., (now Somerville) the "Grand Union" flag.



It was the emblem of the United Colonies of America, Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhodeisland and Providence Plantations, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, from January 1, 1776, until July 4, 1776.

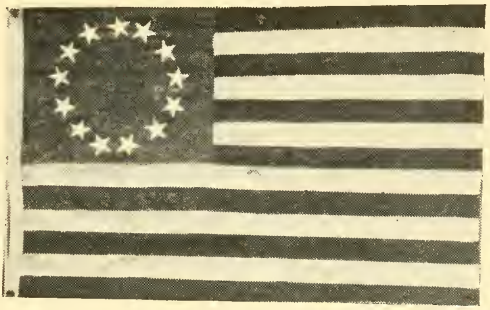
It was the emblem of the United States of America, i.e., Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina and Rhode Island, from July 4, 1776, until the adoption of its immediate successor the "Stars and Stripes" on June 14, 1777.

The "Grand Union" was a modification of the Red Union Ensign, which had been our flag for sixty-nine years. It was derived at by dividing the red field of the colonial flag into seven stripes, placing a white stripe between each red one. The stripes represented the new union of the thirteen British colonies. The blended crosses on the blue field in the canton represented the old Union. We retained the old union according to the act of the British Parliament of 1707, for we were still Englishmen acknowledging our allegiance to the Crown, and were not fighting for independence but for our just rights as Englishmen.

It has been said that the idea of a striped flag suggested itself from the striped flag of the States General of Holland of 1579 (Europe's oldest federal republic) whose stripes signified "One for all and all for one".

On July 4, 1776, we declared ourselves an independent nation and absolved all allegiance to the British Crown. The question of a national flag for the United States of America was not considered seriously until almost a year after we had declared our independence. We already had an emblem which represented the new Union; to change the canton was not generally regarded at first as a matter of importance—the stripes being the most conspicuous part of the flag—but we soon became aware, however, of the fact that while the American Union was represented on the flag it, at the same time, contained the British Union. So it was decided to replace the blended crosses on the blue field in the canton by a distinctive American feature.

A modification of the "Grand Union" having been decided upon, Continental Congress on June 14, 1777, "Resolved that the flag of the 'thirteen' United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the Union be thirteen stars, white, in a blue field, representing a new constellation". So the blended crosses of St. George and St. Andrew were lifted out of the blue field and in their place appeared thirteen white stars.



Lyra, a northern constellation of thirteen stars, implying unity and strength, suggested the idea of adopting the stars of Heaven as the American device. The words of Continental Congress, "a new constellation," shows that the stars of Heaven were chosen indicating that we were a new constellation in the political firmament.

There were two flags, which doubtless played an important part in the drafting of Our Flag. The first American flag to contain stripes was that of the Philadelphia Light Horse. The field of this banner was of bright yellow silk, and its canton contained thirteen stripes, alternate blue and silver. It has been intimated that the stripes in this flag were borne in mind by those who had in hand the matter of a flag for the United Colonies. The other is the flag of the Rhode Island Brigade of 1775, which contained thirteen five pointed stars in a canton of blue. This flag undoubtedly was well known to the committee which had the selecting of the American device.

In the first design of the "Stars and Stripes" the stars in the blue field were arranged in the form of a circle—symbolizing the perpetuity of the Union. The arrange-

ment of the stars in the form of a circle is said to have been suggested by the device on the Linked Hand Flag of Newburyport, Mass., of 1775,—thirteen mailed fists holding thirteen links of an endless chain arranged in the form of a circle. It represented the sentiment of "United we stand."

General Washington referred to the "Stars and Stripes" as follows: "We take the stars from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes; thus showing that we have separated from her; and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty".

Who the designers of the "Grand Union" and the "Stars and Stripes" were is not known. The Congressional committee, consisting of Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Harrison and Thomas Lynch, appointed to confer with General Washington at Cambridge, Mass., in October, 1775, might have had the subject of a flag for the United Colonies under consideration. There is evidence, however, that at least one of this committee, Benjamin Franklin, was deeply interested in the creation not only of the "Grand Union" but of its immediate successor, the "Stars and Stripes".

The first design of the "Stars and Stripes" was purely a revolutionary emblem. It was in use during the remaining years of the war for American Independence, and during that period of our country under the Articles of Confederation.

In our first flag under the Constitution, the stars in the blue field were arranged in three horizontal rows, with four, five, four stars in each row, known as the naval arrangement. It remained our flag until 1795.

The Constitution of the United States provided for the admission of new States into the Union, but no provision had been made by Continental Congress in the Flag Act of 1777, or by the United States Congress, for representation of new States in the Union on the flag.

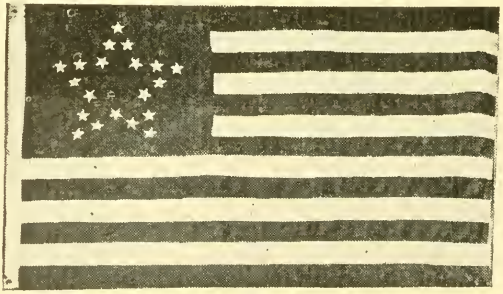
Vermont was admitted into the Union in 1791, and Kentucky in 1792. Both these States wanted representation on the flag, so it was decided to add a star and a stripe for each one of these new States.

On January 13, 1794, Congress passed the second Flag Act. "Be it enacted etc., That from and after the first day of May, One thousand seven hundred and ninety-five, the flag of the United States be fifteen stripes, alternate red and white, and that the Union be fifteen stars, white, in a blue field."

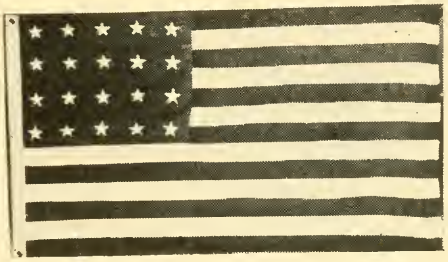
This was our flag during the War of 1812 and remained our flag until 1818. It was to this flag that Francis Scott Key on the morning of September 14, 1814, wrote the words of the "Star Spangled Banner".

Between 1795 and 1818, five more States were admitted into the Union, Tennessee 1796, Ohio 1801, Louisiana 1812, Indiana 1816, and Mississippi 1817, but up to this time Congress had made no provision for representation of additional states on the flag, so it again became necessary to alter our flag. The accession of these new States and the certain prospect that at no distant date the number of States would be considerably multiplied, rendered it inexpedient to increase the number of stripes, as every flag must in some measure be limited in size. It was, therefore, decided to reduce the number of stripes to the original thirteen representing the number of States that achieved their independence, and to increase the stars to correspond with the number of States then in the Union, and thereafter add one star to the flag whenever a new State should be fully admitted.

On April 4, 1818, Congress passed the third Flag Act. "Sect. 1—Be it enacted etc. That from and after the fourth day of July next, the flag of the United States be thirteen horizontal stripes, alternate red and white: That the Union be twenty stars, white, in a blue field. Sect. 2—Be it further enacted, That on the admission of every new State into the Union, one star be added to the Union in the flag; and that such addition shall take effect on the fourth day of July next succeeding such admission". This was the first Flag Act which said that the stripes should be horizontal.



In the first design under this act the stars were arranged to form one large star. It was in use for a very short period, as it did not meet with approbation, and the stars were again arranged in parallel lines.

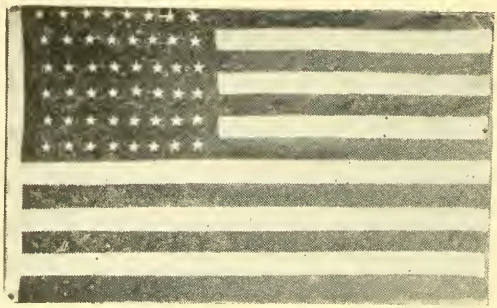


By an executive order issued by President Monroe in 1818, the arrangement of the stripes of our flag was fixed for all times: "From the top to the bottom of the Union there will be seven stripes, and six stripes from the bottom of the Union to the bottom of the flag."

Since 1818, the Union of our flag has been altered twenty-two times by the addition of stars. On July 4, 1819, by the admission of Illinois (21 stars); 1820, Alabama and Maine (23 stars); 1822, Missouri (24 stars); 1836, Arkansas (25 stars); 1837, Michigan (26 stars); 1845, Florida (27 stars); 1846, Texas (28 stars); 1847, Iowa (29 stars); 1848, Wisconsin (30 stars); 1851, California (31 stars); 1858, Minnesota (32 stars); 1859, Oregon (33 stars); 1861, Kansas (34 stars); 1863, West Virginia (35 stars); 1865, Nevada (36 stars); 1867, Nebraska (37 stars); 1877, Colorado (38 stars); 1890, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington and Idaho (43 stars); 1891, Wyoming (44 stars); 1896, Utah (45 stars); 1908, Oklahoma (46 stars); 1912, New Mexico and Arizona (48 stars).

Our Flag in its present form was authorized in 1912 by President Taft in an executive order as follows, "That on and after July 4, 1912, the arrangement of the stars

forming the Union on the blue field, shall be in six horizontal rows, with eight five pointed stars in each row." This was the first official act or order that stated that the stars in our flag should be five pointed and that the rows be horizontal.



The blue field in the canton of our flag represents Heaven, as it did in the flag of Scotland of 937 A. D. and in the "King's Colours" or "Jacques Union" of 1603. There is a legend that in the year 937 A. D. Malcolm I, the King of the Scots, on the night before the battle of Brunanburgh with Athelstan, King of England, saw in the clear blue sky of Heaven the cross of St. Andrew and henceforth adopted it as the national device. In 1603, this same blue field became the basis for the flag of the British Union and it is this same blue field minus its blended crosses, but studded with forty-eight five pointed stars that is in our flag of to-day.

The red stripes of our flag, represent the army, for our first Colonial Army carried the flag of the mother country, the Red Union Ensign, bearing upon its red field some particular device or motto.

The white stripes represents the navy. The first flag authorized by Continental Congress was for Washington's Navy. Its field was white. Upon this white field was a green pine tree and the words "An Appeal to Heaven".

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